

Currents

The Curry College Arts Journal

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Editors - Jim Loftus
Laurie Driscoll

Assistant Editors - John Moore
Janet Tedeschi

Business Editors - Mary Joe Perry
Elizabeth Rosen

Photography Editors - Paul B. White
Stacy Shugerman

Cover drawing by David Cohen

A Green House Production

"Oh, the point, the point doesn't matter! The fact that you're singing, that's the point. That matters."

J.X.L.

"AFTERNOON WALK"

Desiree trudged along the path, feeling haunted. All her life she had just wanted to belong. Why was it that all those around her seemed to have their lives in order? Everything for them just seemed to fall into place.

A place for herself, Desiree thought. That's what she needed and didn't have: a place to be Desiree.

Of all the places on campus, Desiree felt that up here in the woodsy part was her favorite. Here, she could come to think out her problems in the solitude she craved. She could sit and watch the squirrels' treetop acrobatics; she could spend her afternoons here rather than inside at the dorm, where there were always too many annoyances. Often, she had thought, "what a terrific place to be with 'that special guy;'" but, today Desiree decided, she would never bring a man up here to these woods. These woods were here to bring solitude, not detract from it.

It was just as well, she thought. Mike wouldn't understand anyway. But then, men were like that—they never seemed to show an interest in enjoying nature without having to bring home mounted heads to show for it.

Desiree stopped along the path and bent to pick up a smooth, flat rock. She looked at the grey oval as she stood up again. Turning it over and over in her hand, she examined it with her fingers, to get a feel for it as she held it. Smiling to herself, Desiree fingered the stone pensively. "How unlike people stones like this are," she thought aloud. Desiree started at the sound of her voice—it sounded so hollow, so insignificant here in the woods. Consciously lowering her voice to a murmur, she went on, speaking as though to the stone itself. "Why can't people be more open? This stone has nothing to hide—it's smooth and fits nicely into one's hand . . . almost like it was meant to be there. You can see its smoothness and that's all there is to it - inside and out. . . . But people are so much different. On the outside, they appear to be so calm-so smooth . . . but inside there are a million things going on. There are so many rough edges that could be smoothed out that they just don't bother to do anything about."

Desiree sat down on the path near where the stone had been, feeling that, at last, she'd found her place—the place where she belonged.

Nancy Rita Lazzaro

"FOR OUR FIRST YEAR"-

I've thrown out old memories, old hopes and dreams.
My new broken heart, emotion, sadly lapsed.
With sorrowful hatred my body teems.
Would it be better to give up? Perhaps.
I can live without him - just wait and see.
'Won't take any more - I need something new.
No more dependence; I'll live life for me.
More self-sufficient, a new "me" in view.
And then one day, a longing look, a smile.
Things were going to be different now.
"Come live with me, be my love for a while."
Would we be together? Maybe, somehow.
After our first year, our love blossoms true.
No more old memories, just me and you.

Kimberly Dwelley



P. Butler White

UNA VEZ MAS

De día en día, yo espero la
siniestra noticia.
Se que la muerte se aproxima.
Alguien tan fuerte y sereno
está tomado en sus manos y
solo puedo esperar.
A la muerte le digo:

Por qué si eres tan callada
nos llevas tan fugaz.
Acaso no será. . .

LAD que te has equivocado una vez más?

NEWARK TO BOSTON: DELAYED

The airport hallways bounce the blinding white
Of cheap, bright paint off tired, waiting eyes;
And every man would try a colder night,
Turn out his pocket, bluster any lies
To cage a ticket for a lucky plane,
Enchanted, crazy, seeing through the mist.
But nature will sometimes conspire, and rain,
And grab your coat or catch you by the wrist
To keep you where there's nothing but the stark
Reminder of the days you can't call back;
The white-lit terror, fierce as any shark,
That steals the darkness, makes you stand and crack,
And nothing breaks, and no one falls apart;
Time ticks across the sky, and in the heart.

Bill Littlefield

PHANTOM CONSCIOUSNESS

I'm like a soldier
With a blown off leg
Who reaches to scratch
His wooden peg.

It's only a reminder
Of just what's gone.
My Phantom Consciousness
Lingers on.

As absurd
As an unscratchable itch
Yearnings remain
With nothing to gain.

Viewing the world
Through eyes of a stranger
I'm taken for a ride
Observing the danger.

Phantom Consciousness
An arbitrary bookmark
A linear pointed path
Of meaningless times and spaces.

A frozen gangrenous wasteland
Marks the sight
Of a forgotten battle
Waged in the plains of Pain Past
Roamed by a Phantom Caretaker
In search of an owner.

Steve Lonergan

Doc Trenton, the old and former Headmaster

It must have been 1955 or thereabouts. I was a young teacher who had just joined the faculty at Greenberry School, a small day and boarding school in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. One of the first persons I met was "Doc" Trenton, an old and former headmaster. Though he was still teaching two classes in mathematics, he had been moved from the official headmaster's residence to a tiny attic apartment over the vehicle garage at the end of the campus.

Doc was tall and very gaunt, certainly a gentleman of the old school. He had been bald for years. His lower jaw thrust forth in an intimidating manner but he was as gentle as a lamb. Doc was not a good teacher. His appearance was too comical for him to ever be much more than the butt of ninth grade jokes and cartoons. He was patient and longsuffering, however, though occasionally he lost his temper, turned beet-red and yelled at the miscreant student, "Oaf! Young oaf!"

The event occurred late in March, mudtime even in Bucks County. It was Saturday, the second, the second day of Greenberry School's twenty-fifth traditional winter-spring carnival. It was also, as I later found out, Doc Trenton's twenty-fifth year at Greenberry School. The carnival consisted of competition between the student classes. The object of this was not only to win and provide some social interaction between the student classes but also to raise money for the classes. Events planned for the day were a tug-of-war, a race, and an obstacle course, performed in the gym.

The day passed quickly and I soon found that the contestants were participating in their last competition, which was an egg-throwing contest. In this contest, each class had a pair of participants who would throw the egg and the other would catch it. Apparently, the object of this was to throw the egg to a partner without breaking it. If they succeeded, then they would step back a few feet and continue this procedure until there was a winning couple. If the seniors win this, I thought, then it would be their third consecutive win. I glanced at their class advisor, Mr. "Doc" Trenton, who appeared to be not the least amused about how well they had been doing.

I had always wanted to get to know Doc since the beginning of the school year. He appeared to be a kind man somewhat shy, strange, and occasionally grouchy. Despite the fact, I still felt within myself, the need to know this man, and why he was so depressed. Meeting Doc Trenton seemed to be almost impossible as he was either at his classes or residing in his tiny apartment, over the vehicle garage, at the other side of the sixty-acre campus. I figured that while I had the chance I could talk to him.

"Doing anything tonight, Mr. Trenton?" I asked.

"Well, ar. . .no," he replied.

"Well, good. What do you say we get together tonight? We could go to a bar, or bowling, or whatever."

"No, no thank you." He replied, and then said, "I'll tell you what, you come over to my apartment for dinner at seven o'clock."

I could see that his spirit was rising and I did not want to disappoint him.

"Well, what do you say?" he said, smiling.*

"Yeah, sure. Great, I'll be there at seven o'clock!" I said.

Before long, it was seven o'clock, and I had just arrived at the door of his apartment with a case of beer. I did not know what to bring. I remembered my girlfriend telling me that white wine goes good with this and red with that. Disgusted that I didn't know which was which, I figured, ah, what the hell. A few moments later, Doc answered the door and I entered the apartment. It was like walking down a long triangular shaped hall. The roof had such a high pitch that the room was narrow and one could not avoid hitting his head at least once. It was mainly one room, except for the bathroom, with two sections, a family room and a kitchen. There were two windows, one at each end of the room. Above one window was a picture of a man in a suit. The room had a scent to it as that of an Italian restaurant. Doc had made lasagna for dinner and it was good. He seemed to have enjoyed cooking, I thought, and maybe that is why he retires to his apartment so early. It was also obvious that he may not have liked teaching mathematics, just by the way he left his books cluttered and hardly prepared for class. Even more so, Doc would quite often lose his temper.

As time passed that evening, Doc and I sat in the family room and began talking. I asked him who the picture was, the one hanging over the window. He told me that it was a picture of him when he was the school headmaster and it had been taken around 1930. The facial characteristics were basically the same except for the exaggerated lines he began to possess. He had had dark brown hair, that there was soon little of, and apparently his jaw had not thrust forward in that non-appealing manner. I asked him why he was not the Greenberry School's headmaster anymore and instead, a math teacher who lived in the attic. He answered my question with a slight disgust which led me on a guilt trip myself.

"When I was headmaster, I used to have an answer for anything. As you know, I have been headmaster for fifteen years. Oh yes," he sighed, "fifteen graceful, romantic and memorable years, until my wife died of cancer. Then, before long, the school committee was complaining that I was not completing my job and I was fired. They did this without a warning or a second chance. Then they moved me down to the lowest teaching position and housing environment. Damn them!"

I didn't know what to say, yet I felt terrible for Doc. My mind was racing, trying to sort all these thoughts, making some sense out of them. At first it seemed so hard to comprehend. I felt my pulse rate increase. Beads of sweat were forming on my forehead and I was obviously getting nervous. I began wishing I had never brought up the whole thing. Fortunately the night ended quite calmly.

Later I learned that Doc had a brother whom he was not close to. Apparently, he had worked for an oil company. Several years had passed. Doc and I were still friends and I was working at another school. The student population had decreased mainly because of the baby boom of 1955. This meant that times were tough, especially for Greenberry School. Doc was about to lose his job but he kept begging for another chance as headmaster. He believed that he knew how to save the school and I had not doubted this belief either. Doc was hurt, he wrote to the School Committee, the Town Hall, the State House and still, no one would listen. The land was to be sold and the school would soon be gone.

Later, Doc found out that his brother had bought the land and he felt much better, believing that his brother had done him a favor. Unfortunately, he learned that this was not true. Doc begged his brother for it but he too would not listen. I tried to get the land for Doc, but after much effort and no use I began to see no use. Doc turned to alcohol as a solution till he became an alcoholic. He would not take my advice to consult a doctor and soon began journeying into his unconsciousness. I couldn't stand to see him this way any longer so I sent him for mental and emotional help and I took a long vacation.

Some years later, I learned that Doc had died a painful death. Medically, it was cancer of the jaw. But everyone knew that his heart was broken.

*NOTE: The characters are not gay.

Alfred L. Maurer II

KENNY 1979

I wish we could have known you
We just didn't understand
 --or did we even try?
Are we the reason you withdrew?
You sat in the back
 invisible and silent.
 No questions asked--No reply.
No hellos--No good-byes.

You were a wall.
Nobody could penetrate you
 except the insolent.
We couldn't hear you call.
When we did
 you didn't need us anymore.
 No questions--No reply.
No hellos--No good-byes.

I suppose the world grew thick
 with criticism and doubt.
Like a broken pane
 dreams were shattered
 --lost.
The thin tissue
 that held your world together
 was torn.
Silence was broken
 --you went the way alone.
 No questions--No reply.
No hellos--No good-byes.

Announcements are made
You brought your curtain down
 O retaliatory suicide!
No banners, No glory, No parade.
 Are you now the hero or the clown.
Your Eulogy--
 "Kenny, we were on your side"
 Now?
 No questions--No reply.
No encore, Only good-bye.

Edward Gault

ON DEATH AND DYING

Oh! for eternal joy, do we live
With love and move to notice.
While thus entangled, joyed
and showered tho' the morn, we
notice twilight is halfway to
our Home. We love on (!),
as orange glow fades to dark.

Harry Shapiro

crackling orange
on an icicle-laden evening
warms to the toes
the winter's captive guests;

voices chatter
long past the time that
the orange dulls to
cold, cheerless black

a tender kiss
in the blackness;
sparks leap again—
this time from within.

Nancy Rita Lazzaro

I have always walked
with the wind at my back,
the sun on my face.
To the world I have walked alone
but you see
I have walked with One
The One the world cannot see.

Once you shared my path awhile,
showed me a friendship
like I'd never known.
Now I walk alone
with the wind at my back,
the sun on my face,
And with the One the world can't see.

But I know someday
I will walk with another;
The world will see two, not three
with the wind at our backs,
the sun on our faces,
because we will walk with the One,
The One the world can not see.

R.J. Rowe

THAT FEAR

There's a certain type.
Of fear that haunts me.
That fear of terror that I say,
Is the finale of life, when you just can't stay.
Unexpected mostly it comes.
When no-one needs its use.
Loved one for me,
Is swallowed by its shute.
That son-of-a-bitch,
Who cares not a bit
Of whom it captures.
Whose eye in it spits.
Death itself,
Fills the body so full.
Keeping blood and life dead,
But not love and soul.
For the both itself,
Flees free from the pain,
And the corpse that's left.
Is to be put to shame.
It's not fair at all.
Life so full of joy,
Being taken away,
And played like a toy.
When leaving us here,
Alone in our grief.
I hate you for that,
For what took you was our relief.

Paul Clerici



Paul Clerici

WATCHING

When he woke the room was dim
Sunlight's stripes across the bed.
The nurse plopped there, extremely grim
Her sausage fingers speckled red.
Twining yarn, of pink, to snakes
Crochet hook flashed up and down
Catching sunlight from the lake
Bedspread spots of sickly frown.

Carol Costas

CATALEPTIC SLEEP

For no reason I woke
Out of deep sleep last night.
And, rolling over, found
A prostrate mannequin.
Its skin cold to the touch
With a face morbid white

It lay where you had been.

Jim Loftus

Wanting one but having the other,
Putting off what needs to be done and said,
I can't seem to express my displeasure, my pain.
I am caught in a no win situation.
 Caught in a no win situation.

M.A.M.

THE EDGE

Like a huge oak tree,
strong and menacing,
bending but never breaking.

Yet the darkness within,
rotting and devouring,
caught us sleeping
and the big tree lies dead,
 on the edge of our hearts. . .

LAD

THE ALCOHOLIC

Yes I know it's his life.
Cabinets filled with bottles.

Doctors say:
 cirrhosis of liver,
 stop drinking,
 lose weight.

"I'm not an alcoholic."

Understand, he's sick.
Hand reaches out again:
 Wine.
 Vodka.
 Gin.

I Love him,
please stop.
Yes, I know it's his life.

Andrew Carlson

THE NAMELESS FAMOUS

My name is forgotten
As quickly as flashbulbs burn your eyes,
Your fame is unfortunate
I have to keep you in the worst disguises.

Our town is an airplane
Bags thrown in and privacy thrown out
To think we waited for this
Next-seat neighbors empty our accounts

You turn to the wall as if to speak to me,
A clouded wing-tip is all you can see,
I am a person you no longer know,
I was you when private life was your own,

You once wished yourself a star now you're shooting bright,
You want me back, long lost ego fright,
I can no longer hold onto your plane,
Success climbs too fast for your past to remain.

J.H.

MELANCHOLY RAIN

(a romantic vision)

After the storm,
when the clouds spread and
all green stretches and belches water unused.
I am wet with evaporated thoughts.
I remember,

Picnic— years ago. When it smelled green
and damp after it rained.
On the way to the orchard we laughed when
I fell into a puddle— dodging worms.

I kicked dandelions with a snap
sent fuzz balls flying to take root.
Smelled cherry blossoms sweet— sky blue—
clouds broken scattered white.
Tasted rain like feeling thumbs pressed
to the base of my spine.
Tingles to my head.

It was green with silence— birds. Strange feeling
that I would see stars. We laid the blanket down
as if it were magic— and we laid down to look—
at each other and the distance between us and the clouds—
for stars.,

You danced— with grace in silence and small
flowers bracing every step.
Your back split beautiful like a muscle butterfly
with honey white skin.

Under a tree— Haze light soft through pink and seed.
When flower dropped water cupped by petal,
it rolled down my back.

I felt stars and tasted honey.

After, we ate strawberry ice cream with our hands.
I tasted your fingers with strawberry white—
sticky sweet.

Melancholy rain dropped
like cherry popsicles towards
a child's mouth.

Marc Maron

thoughts of you
are ripples in
the pool within my mind.
your blurred and foggy memory
is all that's
left behind.

no clouds on my horizon,
and no more tears I'll cry;
there's just a faded image of
the night you said goodbye.

Nancy Rita Lazzaro



JOB INTERVIEW

The office was an office. It had a reception area, chrome and glass. Magazines. Silent carpeting.

When I came in, the receptionist asked if I wanted coffee. I still had the mug in both hands when it became my turn to be interviewed. A door opened and a man emerged and said my name. I put the coffee down with a sharp sound on the glass table, and then banged the table with my knee when I got up off the couch. Some of the coffee sloshed over the rim of the mug, and beaded on the glass.

The smaller office, where I was interviewed, was quiet and clean. It looked as if nobody worked there.

"I'm happy you could come in," said the man who was interviewing me. "We were most impressed by your resume."

"This morning," I said, "while I was driving along, a flock of birds suddenly swept across the sky in front of me. I almost forgot I was driving. I'd never seen anything like that - all those birds heading south in formation - except in the late afternoon. Once, years ago, I saw something similar from a school yard. All around me children were yelling and chasing each other, playing some game. It was the last hysterical shout before they all went home to dinner. It would be dark soon. And there, a flock of birds fanned out against the cold sky. This morning it was almost like going back to that school yard. I almost forgot I was driving. The birds soared in waves, heading south."

"We particularly like the leadership skills evident here," the interviewer said, tapping my resume lightly with his thumbnail. "You know something about getting results."

"Once, I took a perfect picture," I said. "I was watching the Federales lower the flag in the Zocalo in Mexico City. I was standing in a crowd of people as the soldiers clopped back and forth around the flag pole. They did it every afternoon at the same time. Then, suddenly, a little girl, dark, jumped out in front of the crowd and began to dance. She held her arms up over her head and twirled in the square, just for a moment. That was the picture. Then the soldiers finished with the flag and went back into their barracks."

"Your educational background is also extremely impressive," the man went on.

"Before I got up today," I told him, "my wife turned toward me and took my morning cock in both hands. She leaned forward and kissed me on the navel. Her lips were warm. 'I'll miss you today,' she said."

"But the bottom line, especially in a growth-oriented company like ours, is getting out the product. That, of course, is where you come in. We've been looking for someone who can really ride herd on the creative talent we've already assembled, and get all these

folks producing just as hard as they can." Now the man was tamping tobacco into his pipe with a little metal tool. "I'll be frank with you," he said from under his brows. "What we need to know is whether you're the man we can count on to take this little company right to the top."

"I remember the first time I shaved," I said. "I found an electric razor which had been left in the medicine chest, probably by my grandfather when he'd come to visit us. Maybe he'd left it behind at some point. I plugged it in and shaved my upper lip, which took about two seconds. There was nothing else to shave. My lip felt funny, sort of tingly, even after I'd put the razor away. I thought maybe I'd done it wrong."

"Tell me," said the man, "suppose you were in charge of a particular production run, and meeting the schedule was crucial to filling a contract. Suddenly you realize that the only way you're going to make it is to hold over men who are already tired, and cranky besides. And the contract says you can't force them to stay around. What do you do?"

"You know when you hit a baseball right on the nose?" I asked. "It never hurts. It can be a cold day, where everything else hurts your hands - fouling one off or catching the ball in the pocket of your glove - but when you hit one right on the nose you almost don't feel it at all. Another thing that's funny, when you meet one that way and you feel it jump off the bat, you almost don't care if somebody catches it. That almost doesn't matter. Everybody knows you've hit it square. You have that feeling in your hands and up your arms, anyway."

The interviewer's pipe had sputtered, and he was working at it again. "By the way," he said, "what sort of salary did you have in mind?"

"One morning, I think I'd only been east for a couple of months, I was stopped at a traffic light. I don't remember where I was going, but I could take you right to the intersection. Anyway, this car full of kids pulled up beside me, and the radio in their car was very loud. I looked over at them from my car, you know, the way you look over at something that's suddenly loud, and the guy sitting on the passenger side of the front seat looked back at me and snarled, 'What are you lookin' at, ya goddam kike?' I didn't know what to say. I'm not Jewish, but that wasn't really the point. I didn't know whether to give him the finger or laugh at him. As a matter of fact, I don't remember now what I did do."

"Suppose we offered you the job," the interviewer said. "When could you start? Would there be a problem in leaving your present position?"

"Isn't it funny," I said, "how in your dreams sometimes people melt into each other? Fifteen years ago I met a woman who winked

at me and told me I would be a wonderful lover. Much more recently I worked with a woman who taught me how to be a friend. Some night I hope I have a dream where those two melt into one."

Time had passed. The interviewer cleared his throat. "I'll be talking to other candidates," he said, at least through the end of next week. After that you'll be hearing from us, in regard to a second round of interviews, in which various other members of the search committee will be involved."

Outside his window the sun danced in a cloudless sky, and paid no attention.

I walked through the outer office, where the coffee spill had been cleaned up, and down the stairs, and into the street, which was just the street.

Bill Littlefield



P. Butler White

SHORT RIDE

Running on excellent
The fuel light on
going a hundred three
gonna stall her
dum ditt-de-de-de
Ain't got nothing to show
for it, not now
But a splitting headache
Right to my toes
dum dit-de-de-de

And got my name down in
Guinness' Book of Records
for the fastest stall ever
at a hundred three mph
dum ditt-de-de-de

R.J. Rowe



Stacy Shugerman

The Roman Myth of Demeter and Persephone

The earth-mother goddess Demeter had one daughter, Persephone, whom she loved dearly. One day the god of the underworld and of death, Pluto, drove his chariot up through a cavern and kidnapped Persephone, carrying her away despite her protests. Demeter was completely distraught at the loss of her daughter and at her own loneliness. She wept, and crops stopped growing because of the sorrow of the earth mother.

Meanwhile Persephone was holding out against Pluto by not eating, thus not accepting him or becoming part of his household. Eventually, however, she did eat a few pomegranate seeds, and that eating gave her a strong link to Pluto's world.

Since the earth-mother goddess was distraught and sorrowing, the earth stopped bearing plants and fruits and crops. Winter came, bringing barrenness. Seeing this desolation in the earth, the King of the Gods, Zeus decreed that Pluto must release Persephone for nine months of the year. During those months—spring, summer, and autumn—Demeter-earth is flourishing and fruitful with her daughter Persephone beside her; but during the three winter months when Persephone is underground with Pluto, the earth is cold, bleak, and barren.

THE DAUGHTER'S CAR with compliments to Persephone and Demeter

The daughter asks, "Buy me a car?"
Demeter feels, "Too much? by far?"
But I've no husband here to ask;
Deciding is a fearful task."

Persephone weeps: "No way to go
To places up or ones below."
Then Pluto, listening, in his car
Roars up; that Jaguar

Looks great to Persephone
Who shouts, "A car for me!
And it is free!"

No need to give her pretexts thin
Or kidnap her. She jumps right in.
But when she asks to drive that car,
He just speeds up to travel far.

She yells in anger, "This is dumb!"
Then scrambles out: "I'd rather thumb!"
Pluto is helpless at her strength
And drives his Jaguar off the brink.

To depths where he is seen no more,
Gas pedal still jammed to the floor.
And as for helpless old Demeter,
No more. The gods do not repeat her.

Meanwhile for our Persephone
Three years of thumbing helped her see
No "someone else's" car is free.

Fran MacPherson

TONATIUH

I

When I was a little boy, you were my friend
-driving away the night and the demons in my mind
I would rise early in the morning and look out
to see you dancing on the lake. A glimmering carpet of
gold
The grass, blanketed with morning dew,
would glisten at your magic touch.
I remember how the trees would reach to you,
and you would reach down to them,
sending a shower of light to the smallest living thing.
The stream would carry a sparkle
to its loneliest depth
You warmed my face and dried my tears,
-when Grandpa passed away.
You shone in on little Jenny, resting in her crib.
bringing the hope of a new day.
You lit my way home when I was lost
O lunar lantern in the sky!
You revolved around my world then,
showing me life glazed over,
by cotton candy and lemonade.
The people I loved,
the places I'd seen,
the victories and defeats,
and the sweet taste, pilfered wine;
And you were there
rising in my harbor.

II

Years have passed since-
You're no longer the poet's dream you used to be,
-but a mass of gases exploding in space.
I no longer see you when I rise,
I guess I missed you on my way to work,
But I can still see your reflection,
shining in the dingy windows
of crumbling factories long since shut down.
We built new ones through, much better than before,
(Do you remember where the park used to be?)
I suppose you remember a lot of things that used to be.
Standing tall and proud as metallic gods,
our missiles reach up to you, and you to them-
and how they glisten to your gift,
you haven't lost your magic touch.
Grandpa's grave is still there, untouched by time and remembered!
A few feet away lies little Jenny, who at six years
met her mother's fatal blow.
The people I loved moved away or lost touch,
The places I traveled in my youth are now at war.
My victories are yellowed newspaper clippings
pasted in an album, sitting on the top shelf.
You no longer revolve around my world
but I now revolve around yours.
Please, if it's all the same to your,
I like it my way better.
Thank you.

Edward Gault

LOVEJOY!

Scene 1: Third Week of October, 1837

(Elijah, Owen, and Joseph Lovejoy, armed with muskets and pistols, sit around bed where Elijah's wife is lying with little motion or sound save an occasional stirring and moaning. Joseph gets up, walks to window, parts drapes, and peers out.)

Owen: Is he still there, watching us?

Joseph: A different fellow, one with a dark rough seaman's jacket.

Owen: Be sure he sees your musket. (Joseph obliges, lingers a moment, then returns to his seat.)

Owen (to Elijah): How long after you first arrived in Alton did the mob destroy your press?

Elijah: No more than 48 hours.

Owen: And the second attack?

Elijah: Over a year later. They threw my second press into the Mississippi.

Owen: I recall that you wrote that they seized you, too, this time.

Elijah: Intended to tar and feather me and set me adrift in the river.

Joseph: How did you escape, brother?

Elijah: God's hands were upon me.

Joseph (drily): No doubt, but how did you escape?

Elijah: I heard the leader of the mob say, "Boys, I cannot lay my hands upon as brave and defenseless a man as this."

Owen (sardonically): Praise the Lord.

Elijah (missing the irony): Amen. Too bad he—and they—cannot extend that sentiment to those of black skin. You both know how I would have fared had I been black.

Owen: And last month, before you wrote us for help?

Elijah: First, a dozen men smashed my press, my third press . . .

Owen: The same men?

Elijah: I couldn't tell; they were masked. A few days later a mob broke every window of this house with bricks and stones.

Joseph: Were you there, Elijah?

Elijah: No. (Pause) Only Elizabeth (pointing to his wife) and the baby.

Owen: Did she then take to the bed?

Elijah: No, that happened after the attack in Missouri.

Joseph: When you were visiting Mother in St. Charles?

Elijah: Yes. The cowards, besotted with drink, broke right into the house.

Owen: Was Elizabeth harmed . . . physically?

Elijah (painfully): No, Owen. (Pause) She wasn't touched by them. (Pause) She sustained some bruises as the three of us struggled to get out of the house with the baby. But it's not the bruises . . .

Joseph: Mother?

Elijah: Is all right. Some neighbors helped her put the house to rights. (Pause) We returned to Alton at once. No point in bringing our grief to her. But she is the most doughty and stoic of us all.

Owen (drily): We know. (Pause) Did the doctor see Elizabeth?

Elijah: Yes. (Pause) Nothing can be done . . . beyond rest and peace . . . and prayer. (Pause) She seems to have lost the joy of life, even the will to live. The baby (falteringly)—she won't reach out even to the child.

Joseph: The neighbor brings him in?

Elijah: Two or three times a day . . . to no avail.

Owen (bringing himself up): Elijah—brother—it is time for you to bring to an end your activities as a crusading editor—at least in this part of the country. Bring them to an end while there is still time to save all of your lives.

Elijah: How can I?

Owen: By stopping, coming back to Maine with us. Life is precious.

Elijah: All life is precious, Negro life as well as mine.

Owen: Don't I know that! I am not asking you to abandon the struggle.

Elijah: I cannot run, Owen.

Owen: Stubbornness is a kind of pride, Reverend brother.

Elijah: How could I live with myself?

Owen: The way all of us do. Slavery is evil. But one man cannot end it. Nor should he if he could. We must convince the great masses of people themselves that it is wrong, wrong for what it is doing to whites as well as blacks. Only they themselves can end it.

Elijah: But that is what I am trying to do.

Owen: A good soldier—a successful one—adapts himself to the conditions of combat. If he meets a stone wall of resistance, he doesn't smash himself against it; he probes to find another crack somewhere down the line. You fled from St. Louis.

Elijah: I had no one there; but here I have friends; above all, I have you. (Pause) I know there is truth in what you say, Owen, but a man should be allowed to practise his God-given rights anywhere in this land.

Owen: True, but we are not living in Canaan, Reverend brother. We are in Illinois, on the banks of the Mississippi. You are dealing with Tontine Row toughs, Mississippi rivermen—bartenders and bouncers, gamblers and pimps—people who would unhesitatingly rip off your ears, gouge out your eyes, rape your wife . . .

Elijah: If I run, it will be seen as a defeat for the abolition movement.

Owen: Are you being used by that movement? There are a lot of cold fish in it that would think nothing of sacrificing your blood—and hers—for their politics.

Joseph: Like that preacher that was in here praying with you when we arrived today. Reverend Righteous.

Elijah: Reverend Beecher.

Joseph: I don't trust him.

Elijah: A good man, Joseph.

Joseph: Too good to be true . . . to himself. (Pause) He even wanted us to invite that spy (nods toward window) out there into the house so we could talk to him.

Owen: Brother, I respect your idealism. I always have. I share your values. But if you want to live in this world you must weigh things. What does it cost me and what do I get for it?

Elijah (lowly): What do I get for it? Did Christ?

Owen: He was crucified.

Elijah: Perhaps I must go the Way of the Cross.

Owen: Must you send her . . . and your child? Have they elected to join you there? Can they elect anything at this moment in their lives? Have you the right to commit them to the Cross?

Elijah (sobbing): You are torturing me. Owen, Joseph, you are making things even more difficult for me. Why did you come here?

Joseph: Because you asked us. We are your brothers.

Owen: We are here to protect you even in spite of yourself.

Joseph: And, in God's name, the only way to protect you is to get you out of here.

Elijah: You came as my brothers. I too came as a brother. All people—black and white—are our brothers and sisters. Our family is mankind. And I must live with myself. I have listened, but neither of you has shown me how I can do that.

Owen (on a new tack): When has the world been without evil?

Elijah (Pause): Perhaps never, but there have always been witnesses. We are not the first. We must be worthy of them. (Musing) There have always been witnesses.

Owen: Some who choose to live and struggle (Pause) and some to die.

Elijah: That choice is not always ours to make. There is no compromise with slavery. The issue of slavery is not like some debatable tax proposal or land dispute: it is not debatable. If someone is beating you, there can be no debate about the severity or duration of that beating: he must stop at once. And we, as bystanders, are obligated to make him stop at once. The Clays and Calhouns may be wise and clever fellows, but the times call for—cry out for—wise men. Compromisers reach reasonable conclusions based on false premises. They are odious to me.

Owen: And to us too. That is not what we propose. (Lowly) Do you want to go the Way of the Cross, Elijah?

Elijah (Carefully): No . . . No . . . but I may have to.

Owen: You don't have to . . . Perhaps the Way of the Cross is itself a temptation, an elitist and even selfish act. I did not go to seminary, like you, but I know that, according to most of the evangelists, Jesus wished that the cup would pass from Him: even He did not choose the Way of the Cross.

Elijah: Did He weigh things?

Owen: There is no way of knowing for certain.

Elijah: Suppose I agree with you about weighing things. (I am human, not God, and I do have a wife and a child whom I love.) But how little we know of the causes and the consequences of our acts. Do we know enough in order to weigh properly?

Joseph: Live!!

Elijah: At what cost?

Owen: But death has its price, too (nodding toward bed).

Elijah: So either way I turn I must pay.

Owen: The understanding and acceptance of that is what maturity is all about.

Elijah: But what if the kind of change that is needed in this country today can be brought about only by God's fools, people who have failed to

mature? What if every other kind of change, the ones proposed by sensible people, make sense in the short run and end up as utter madness over the long haul?

Owen: My poor dear Elijah, planning for the future of the nation while we are all at our wits' end trying to keep you alive from hour to hour. (Pause) Well, it's my turn to make an appearance at the window.

(curtain)

Scene #2: same setting, two days later

Owen Lovejoy (reading a list): "Usher Linder, the Attorney General; Reverend Honest John Hogan; . . ." Hogan, Linder, no wonder this crowd passed a resolution condemning abolition at a founding convention of an abolition society. And those are just the "respectable" names. To get those pluralities, the saloons from Tontine Row must have emptied out. How did those people and their ilk find their way to our convention?

Rev. Beecher: We invited all "friends of free inquiry," and they feel that they are such.

Owen: Are you mad?

Elijah: Brother!

Owen: How can you invite wolves to a gathering of sheep?

Beecher (undaunted): We must reach out to all. It is our job to make one rational resolution after another in order to move toward a universally accepted truth.

Owen: You have one of the finest minds of the 18th century, but we happen to live in the 19th century. After the Terror in France, after Napoleon, and during the Darkest Age of Slavery—right in the middle of it.

Beecher: To deny others freedom to speak would be to defeat our cause.

Owen: Holding a convention among like minded people is not denying free speech to others.

Beecher: We must persuade all people.

Owen: They will prevent us from organizing, and without organizing, how will we persuade anyone of anything?

Elijah: It wasn't all for naught. You know they did approve—unanimously—the re-opening of the newspaper with me as editor. And they contributed to a new press, my fourth.

Owen: Let it not be your cross.

(curtain)

Scene #3: the house, a week later

(Elijah, walking home, hears roar of crowd, hurries, sees tail end of retreating crowd, dodges rocks flying about him. Amid curses and screams he rushes into house passing two drunken men lurching out of it.)

Elijah (rushing from room to room): Elizabeth! my darling! Elizabeth! (Sound of rocks thudding against house, glass breaking, screams of mob outside. Finally Lovejoy finds his wife crouched over his son in center of attic floor.) My dear, my love, my own.

(curtain)

Scene #4: bedroom, Nov. 1st

Elijah: Yes, I did it. I resigned. I gave the statement to the *Alton Telegraph*.

Beecher: They gave it back to us . . . for corrections. (Takes paper out of his pocket.) Here it is. *Elijah*, tear it up, for the sake of suffering Christ.

Elijah: For the sake of that poor dear woman lying there driven out of her wits, I cannot continue the fight here. Let them kill me and be done with it, but not hound her to distraction. I must leave Alton to carry on the struggle elsewhere. I cannot have that woman's blood on my hands.

Beecher: But you don't want other blood on your hands.

Elijah (alarmed): What do you mean?

Beecher: If you flee you will encourage mobs everywhere. Other editors will be threatened: James Birney in Cincinnati; William Lloyd Garrison in Boston. And mobs everywhere, from Kentucky and Missouri to Vermont and New Hampshire, will renew their attacks on abolitionist meetings. *Elijah*, you are in danger, yes, but you are the cutting edge of our movement. You must hold for all, for the sake of us all, white and black.

Elijah (slowly): Blood either way I turn . . . I am but one man.

Beecher: You love your wife. But the slave loves his, too, and he might argue that for her sake he must shed the blood of others.

Elijah (beaten): No. Don't . . .

Beecher: *Elijah*, let us pray for guidance. (Both kneel before bed.) Dear Lord, give us the strength to carry your Word, to carry on your work, strength not to turn our backs on our suffering brothers, not to leave them naked to the lash and the gun. Give us the strength . . . (Silent prayer. Both rise.) Elizabeth, your days of trial are nearly over. More tranquil hours are at hand. (He gives the paper to *Elijah*, who, almost dream-like, tears it up.)

(curtain)

Scene #5: Honest John Hogan's Countinghouse

(Gamblers, saloon keepers, rivermen dominate group. Much loud banter until all is hushed by the entrance of Reverend Beecher and Reverend Lovejoy.)

Cyrus Edwards (after a rap of the gavel): Meeting is called to order.

Beecher: Mr. Chairman, I have a resolution . . .

Edwards (another gavel rap): Out of order. I rule that you, Reverend Beecher, not being a citizen of Alton, are here upon not permitted to vote or to address this meeting.

Beecher: Mr. Chairman!

Edwards: All in favor of that ruling say 'Aye!'

Almost all: AYE!

Edwards: Opposed, say 'No!'

Few: No.

Edwards: Ayes have it: ruling is carried. Now for the committee report. Reverend Hogan.

Hogan: Mr. Chairman, we of the committee were faced with a dilemma. On the one hand, we all believe that freedom of the press must be protected. On the other hand, we feel that Reverend Lovejoy's radical sentiments do not represent the views of most of our citizens, and in fact, are killing our town, our Alton. In presenting the following resolution, we offer what we feel is a

fair compromise: Resolved that Reverend Lovejoy resign as editor of the *Observer* and leave Alton, but not in disgrace, in full honor; the town itself will help him and his family relocate.

Edwards: Discussion?

Voice: Call for the vote!

Edwards: All in favor, say 'Aye!'

Almost all: AYE!

Edwards: Opposed, say 'No!'

Few: No.

Edwards: Ayes have it.

Lovejoy: Mr. Chairman.

Edwards: The chair recognizes Reverend Lovejoy.

Lovejoy: Mr. Chairman, I do not admit that it is the business of this assembly to decide whether I shall or shall not publish a newspaper in this city. The gentlemen have, as the lawyers say, made a wrong issue. I have the right to do it. I know that I have the right freely to speak and publish my sentiments, subject only to the laws of the land for the abuse of that right. This right was given to me by my Maker; and it is solemnly guaranteed to me by the Constitution of the United States and of this state.

What I wish to know of you is whether you will protect me in the exercise of this right; or whether, as heretofore, I am to be subjected to personal indignity and outrage. This resolution is spoken of as a compromise—a compromise between two parties. Mr. Chairman, this is not so. There is but one party here. It is simply a question whether the law shall be enforced, or whether the mob shall be allowed, as they now do, to continue to trample it under their feet, by violating with impunity the rights of an innocent individual.

It has been said that my hand is against every man, and every man's hand is against me. The last part of the declaration is too painfully true. I do indeed find almost every hand lifted against me; but against whom in this place has my hand been raised? I appeal to every individual present; whom of you have I injured? Whose character have I traduced? Whose family have I molested? Whose business have I meddled with? If any, let him rise here and testify against me. (Pause. Only the sound of breathing is heard.)

No one answers. You have been exhorted to be lenient and compassionate; and in driving me away to fix no unnecessary disgrace upon me. Sir, I reject all such compassion. You cannot disgrace me. Scandal and falsehood and calumny have already done their worst. My shoulders have borne the burden till it sits easy upon them.

You may hang me up as the mob hung up the individuals of Vicksburg. You may burn me at the stake as they did McIntosh at St. Louis; or you may tar and feather me, or throw me into the Mississippi as you have often threatened to do; but you cannot disgrace me. I, and I alone, can disgrace myself; and the deepest of all disgrace would be, at a time like this, to deny my Master by forsaking his cause. He died for me; and I were most unworthy to bear his name, should I refuse, if need be, to die for him.

God in his providence—so say all my brethren, and so I think—has devolved upon me the responsibility of maintaining my ground here, and, Mr. Chairman, I am determined to do it. Why should I flee from Alton? Is

this not a free state? When assailed by a mob at St. Louis, I came hither, as to the home of freedom and the laws. The mob has pursued me here, and why should I retreat again? Where can I be safe if not here? Have I not a right to claim the protection of the laws? Sir, the very act of retreating will embolden the mob to follow me wherever I go. No, sir: there is no way to escape the mob but to abandon the path of duty; and that God is helping me, I will never do.

It is true, Mr. Chairman, that I am a husband and a father; and 'tis it is that adds the bitterest ingredient to the cup of sorrow I am called to drink. I am made to feel the wisdom of the Apostle's advice, "It is better not to marry." I know, sir that in this contest I stake not my life only, but that of others also. I do not expect my wife will ever recover the shock received at the awful scenes, through which she was excelled to pass, at St. Charles. And how was it the other night, on my return to my house? I found her driven to the garret, through fear of the mob who were prowling round my house.

And scarcely had I entered the house where my windows were broken in by the brickbats of the mob; and she so alarmed that it was impossible for her to sleep or rest that night. I am hunted as a partridge upon the mountains. I am pursued as a felon through your streets; and to the guardian power of the law I look in vain for protection against violence, which even the vilest criminal may claim. (Many, including Lovejoy, weep.) I am not unhappy, I have counted the cost, and stand prepared freely to offer up my all in the service of God. Yes sir, I am fully aware of all the sacrifice I make in here pledging myself to continue this contest to the last. (Forgive these tears—I had not intended to shed them—and they flow not for myself but others.) But I am commanded to forsake father and mother and wife and children for Jesus' sake: and as His professed disciple I stand prepared to do it. The time for fulfilling this pledge in my case, it seems to me has come.

Sir, I dare not flee away from Alton. Should I attempt it, I should feel that the angel of the Lord with his flaming sword was pursuing me wherever I went. It is because I fear God that I am not afraid of all who oppose me in this city. No sir, the contest has commenced here; and here it must be finished. Before God, and you all, I here pledge myself to continue it, if need be, till death. If I fall, my grave shall be made in Alton. (Almost all weep.)

(curtain)

Scene #6: (curtain is not drawn) Nov. 7, 1837

(Very loud reports are heard, signifying the murder of Reverend Elijah Lovejoy.)

Scene #7: Church in Hudson, Ohio, late Nov., 1837

Laurens P. Hickock: Dear Friends, thank you for coming. I have ridden all over Hudson township to sound the alarm. By now all of you know that some three weeks ago, on November 7th, Reverend Elijah Lovejoy was murdered in Alton, Illinois as he was defending his press. As you also know, he was murdered because of his belief in a cause I have not heretofore endorsed, that of abolition. But, dear friends, something extraordinary has happened to me, and I am not the only one to be so moved. Word is coming in from all over. Let me just give two examples: in Maine, Reverend Lovejoy's mother has said, "Tis well! I would rather that my son had fallen

a martyr to his cause than that he had proved recreant to his principles." In Massachusetts, Ralph Waldo Emerson has written, "The brave Lovejoy has given his breast to the bullet . . . and has died when it was better not to live. There are always men enough ready to die for the silliest punctilio; to die like dogs . . . but I sternly rejoice that one was bound to die for humanity and the rights of free speech and opinion." Dear Friends, the crisis has come. The question now before the American citizens is no longer alone, "Can the slaves be made free?" but "Are we free or are we slaves under Southern mob law?" I propose that we take measures to procure another press and another editor. If a like fate attends him, send another till the whole country is aroused; and if you can find no better man for the first victim send me.

Owen Brown: F-f-friends, I wish to add t-t-two things to what P-P-Professor Hickock has said: First, we must never forget Reverend Lovejoy's last public words—"If I fall my grave must be in Alton." Second and last, I want to s-s-second what Professor Hickok has said: I am now 67 years of age and I say if you can find no better man for the second victim send me.

John Brown (in back of church rising and raising his right hand): Here before God in the presence of these witnesses, I consecrate my life to the destruction of slavery.

Man (lowly to Edward Brown): Who is that man back there?

Edward Brown: My cousin, sir, John Brown.

(curtain)

Marvin Mandell



Edward Gault

ESSENTIAL CREDENTIALS

Trying Tying Tagings
 Around a Substanceless Void
 Where it is said
 I really am.
 But tying
 Suggest conclusion.
 But an anchorless marker
 Soon enough
 Becomes a realized illusion.

My portraits I try to paint
 But as the brush is released
 of my rigid grip
 My lines start their emptying smear
 And my colors die a stoney gray.

As the canvas grows cold
 The image is already
 Dead and old
 As if it never lived
 Never lived
 Never born.

Steve Lonergan

INWARD GAZE

Two roses stand sullen, petals colored by time.
Resembling airless blood in their scarlet darkness.
Bent, brittle stems plummet into the arid emptiness
of a bottle once fluent with bacchanal promise.
Evaporated fire, each seeking sustenance
Delicate they dry in the air of neglect
Bought on a street in Euphoria
And wilting on a desolate shelf.

Jim Loftus

ELEVATOR

Words are a crystal lozenge cage,
the elevator going up and down
along the levels of the universe.

Within that cage, the consciousness
looks out, distinguishing as best it can
the moving numbers up above the door.

Fran MacPherson

POLAR DESERT

White roofs.
The trees
 with bare limbs
 arch over,
yet reach for the sky.
The tracks
 stretch across the frozen
 ground
toward the horizon,
 then vanish—snow gusts.
Telephone posts mark the
 way in a
Polar desert.
A tranquil sanctuary
 can be found for
 those who like
the quiet beneath the
 ice pond.
Like arrows, icicles
 hanging from the wires
 point the way.
The sun triumphs
 —snow glistens.

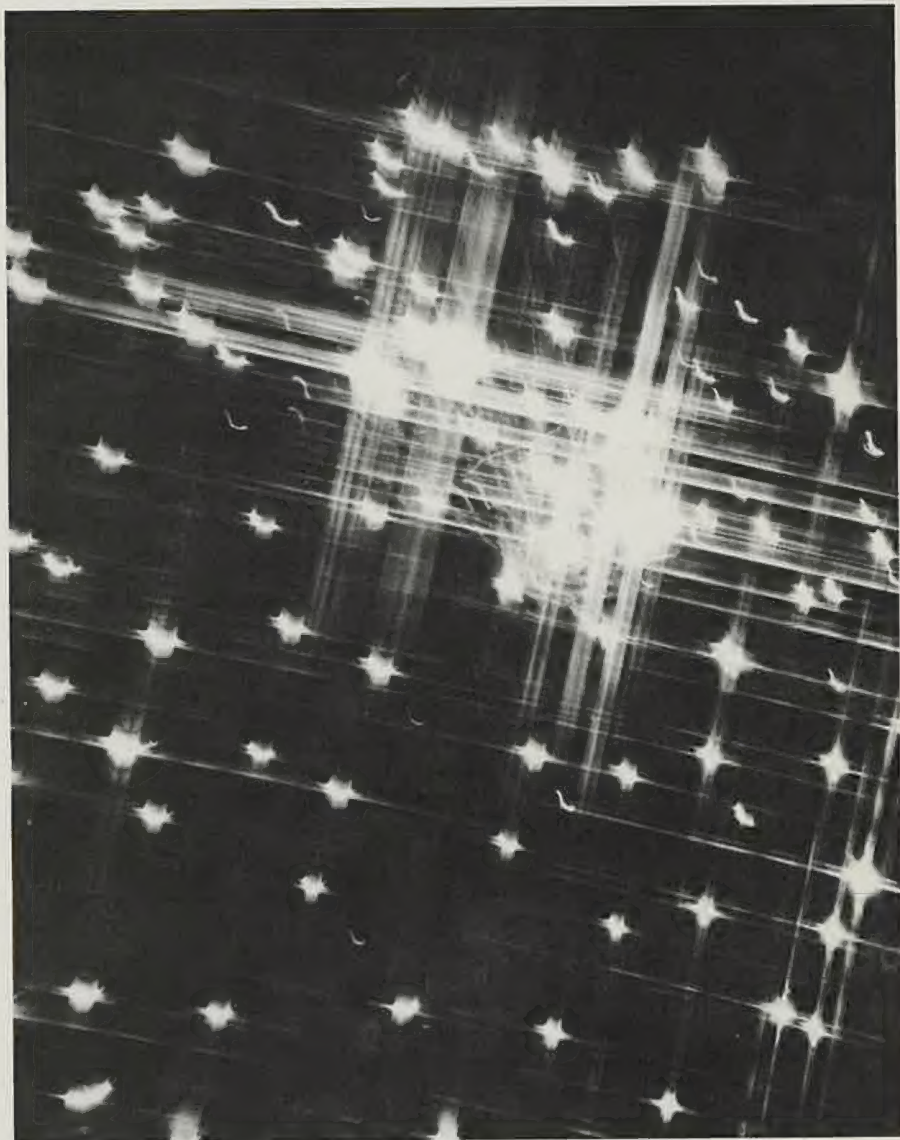
Edward Gault

TRAVELOG

The paper clip of time and space
holds in our consciousness
when we are small

til we and land into the sea
swim fearlessly
in ocean's All.

Fran MacPherson



Paul Clerici

GRANDMOTHER

I see her again
 as I unpack the paper bags--
 the afghans she crocheted,
 an old kerosene lamp
 with blue flowers on it,
 scrap books,
 and photo albums.
 And I hear her saying
 who the people are
 as I flip the pages.
 My hands begin to shake,
 so I hide her things away,
 except for one of the afghans
 I keep on my bed;
 It reminds me of her--
 the old house,
 staying there,
 of walking through the trees
 hearing her tell of--
 the deer among the spruce,
 the bluebirds,
 and the Queen Anne's lace.

R.J. Rowe

